Letter from Taizé

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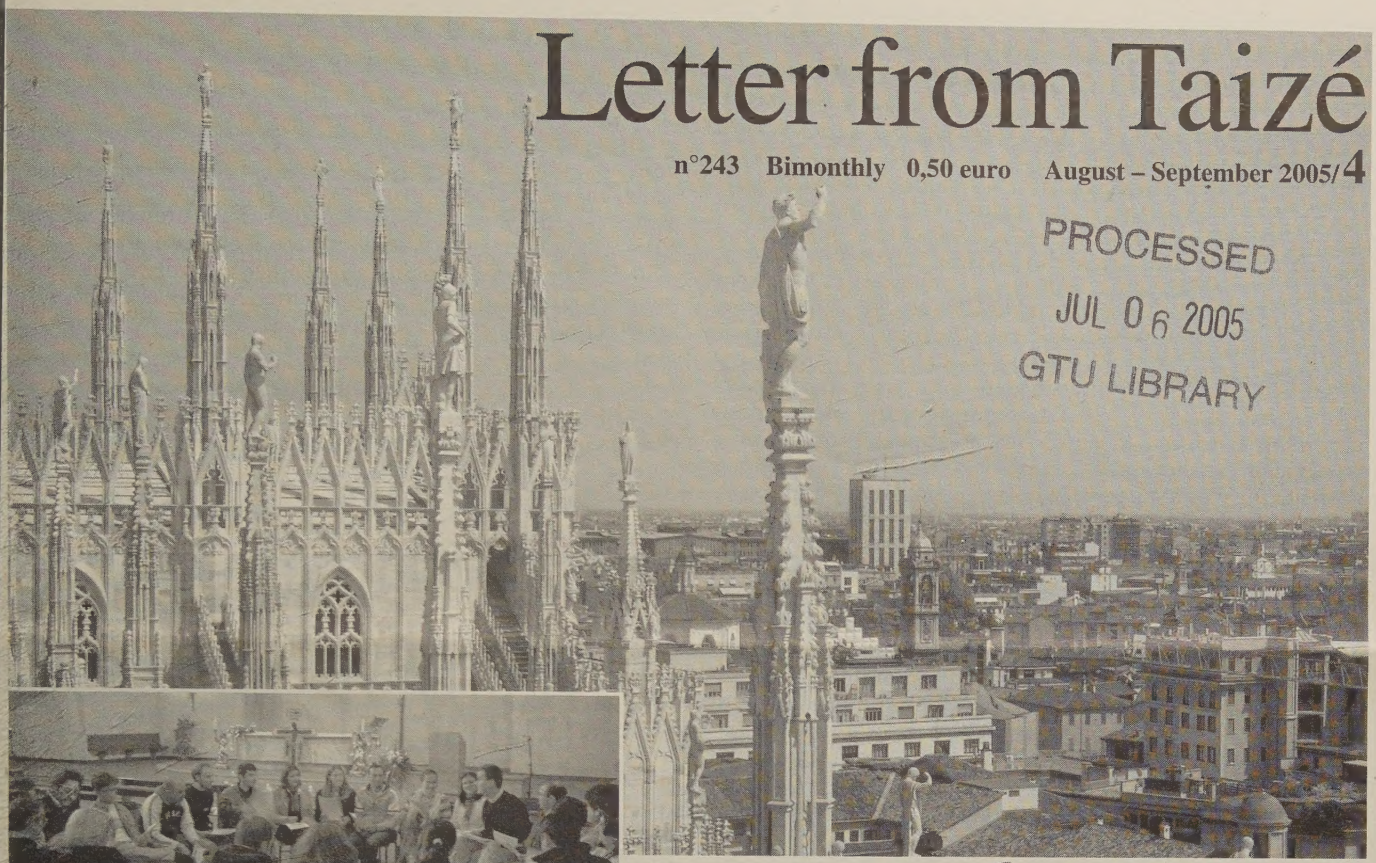


28 December 2005
- 1 January 2006

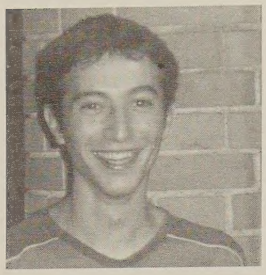
Taizé
Milan

THE MILAN MEETING

Deepen the Tradition and Make It Creative

The diocese of Milan is preparing to welcome tens of thousands of young adults from December 28th 2005 to January 1st 2006, for the 28th European meeting organized by Taizé as part of the pilgrimage of trust on earth. The following lines present some specific features of the metropolis of Lombardy, the challenges present in the life of the financial capital of Italy, and the expectations caused by such a meeting at the end of the year. From Saint Ambrose, the remarkable bishop of the fourth century, to Stefano, a young student of the twenty-first century, from reflection on God's Word so central to the pastoral work of the largest diocese in the world to the social awareness shown by Miriam and Agata, one and the same fire burns in the soul of the baptized people of Milan. In this letter we want to show the beautiful way in which the Church of Milan attempts to deepen the tradition and make it creative.

A Heart Able to Open



Stefano is 23 years old and lives in the province of Lecco, in the diocese of Milan. He studies social sciences and recently spent a few weeks in Taizé:

Milan will welcome tens of thousands of young adults for the upcoming European meeting. Yes, welcome! Families from throughout the diocese will open wide their doors and their hearts to the young pilgrims who come from across Europe.

But what does it mean to "welcome" for a diocese as large and as diverse as Milan? Our Ambrosian diocese, like the entire Church, needs at this particular moment of its history to go down to the depths of the Christian experience. It needs to understand what it means to be the Church today, in 2005, and to rediscover how to proclaim by its life the Gospel and that great and mysterious reality called communion.

In order to do this, is not the important thing precisely to come together by welcoming one another as brothers and sisters? To share our experiences in order to learn from each other? To "go to the potter's workshop" all together and let ourselves be fashioned by those hands that loved and suffered so much for the Church?

The grey financial metropolis has a heart

The inhabitants of Milan will thus live an extraordinary week during which, through prayers, silence, sharing and celebration, they will be able to go down to the deep roots of their faith, to strengthen it by going "from one beginning to another," in order to announce to all with increased clarity the Gospel of Life and to be seeds, sowers and builders of a world of peace that is possible. Beyond all fear, however comprehensible, Milan, the big grey financial metropolis, where everything seems to run fast, where nothing stands still, where everything seems submerged in a river of feverish activity, will show that this in fact is not true. Milan, our Milan, has a heart, a heart beating with life, a heart able to open itself to the unexpected, a heart that can dare to fly high, that bets on and invests in the young.

Seeking together the "why" of our life

All those involved in the upcoming meeting, from the pilgrim looking for a place to stay to those who offer hospitality, will thus have the possibility of encountering a new face. And these new faces will be a support and an encouragement for the little journey of each one—in families, parishes and in the places where each one studies, works or simply rests—and a reflection of the mysterious and fascinating presence of God in mutual fellowship. Welcoming others thus means first of all welcoming God in the person we receive and with whom we share ordinary life day after day. And in the second place, it means building bridges that link us even beyond physical distances and that give us an ever greater awareness that we are citizens of Europe and of the world.

This welcome will give us a precious opportunity to stop and to look for a meaning, a "why", for our own lives, in the light of prayer and attention to the Word, to which the Church of Milan is so dedicated and for which it has been "educated".

The memory of the previous meeting in our city is still alive in those who prepared it, as well as in those who were part of that adventure of hospitality between 1998 and 1999. At that time, many ordinary people were able to experience very concretely the beauty of life together that reminded them of "the way it used to be". This year too, I am sure, that "magic" will happen once again and all together we will be able to say with the psalmist: "See how good it is, how sweet it is to live together as brothers and sisters!"

Solidarity at the Heart of the Italian Financial Capital

Miriam works in Milan for an association that publishes a "street paper" dealing with questions of immigration, multiculturalism, and an economy of solidarity:

Milan is the city, along with Rome, that welcomes (or at least takes in!) the most immigrants to Italy. A sign of hope in our city is the presence of second-generation immigrants; many children of foreigners fill the schools. These new citizens of all colors are a hope for the future, the promise of a new way of living together.

Milan is an ex-industrial city, now made up of offices and services. From the viewpoint of work, it still has to find its identity. We do not yet feel the economic crisis, but people are worried. One of the problems that is becoming more and more evident in our city is that of the so-called "working poor", people who, although they have a job, are not able to support themselves. This category is on the rise and it is the mirror of an economy in crisis, which leads to precariousness.

A record number of volunteers

But a positive sign is the existence of many associations of volunteers. Milan is the city with the record number of such

associations in Italy. Tens of thousands of young adults are active in helping the disadvantaged in all sorts of ways.

Though the city has the reputation of economic productivity and financial interests that have little to do with attentiveness to human beings (the Italian stock exchange is here), Milan is also the city of economic solidarity. Here there is a large concentration of activities begun to create spaces for a sustainable economy: many shops for fair trade, a large number of stockholders in the "*Banca Ethica*", a bank that is based on investments for development, and publishing houses that try to increase awareness of these questions are all located here.

Milan is a city that runs fast and that fights, that never gives up, for good and for ill! It's a city with a lot of energy, that thinks more about speed than about the direction to take. The meeting at the end of the year will be an important opportunity for us to stop and catch our breath, to find times and places to share with the young adults who come to take part.

A Stranger in Milan

Agata from Poland writes:

I came to Milan six months ago and have since been discovering with joy the beauty of this city and its church. I had chosen this place, having in mind the memories of the Taizé meeting seven years ago, when for a few weeks I helped with the preparations. Thus, once again I found myself here with the desire to experience in greater depth the life of a community I remembered as vivid and open towards young people.

Milan is a big city, with its business, fashion and design worlds, where one can easily feel lost in the crowd. In the midst of this hectic life, the Ambrosian church has become to me a sign of hope. My first thought turns towards the Cathedral, the *Duomo*, that apart from being a stupefying piece of architecture, remains a place of silence and prayer, in spite of the tides of tourists. It is a point of reference for the local church, where, for instance, young people met with the Cardinal at Easter time, those preparing for marriage will meet this week, and all of May one can listen to the readings of the Book of Job. I go there often and always find space for silence in God's presence.

After the liturgy someone always comes up to you

My experience of prayer includes celebrations of masses at which, even on weekdays, you find the elderly as well as parents with little children, teenagers and young people—something I had not expected of a metropolis. Sunday liturgies, often prepared by various parish groups, are joyful with lively songs. After the liturgies there will always be someone willing to come up, ask where you came from, kiss you on both cheeks before you realize it, and make you feel welcome.

The stranger does not surprise

My presence here does not surprise most people. I think about the Pilgrimage of Trust, and the pilgrims who will come here from many, even distant places, and I realize that a flow of "strangers" is not new to Milan. The city already welcomes thousands of foreigners, whether from different parts of Europe, from around the world, or—last but not least—people from all over Italy who come here to study and work. In a shop, in a café, in a *pasticceria*, I am often stopped by strangers who want to know where I come from, and what I do here; they are happy to exchange a few words, and always remember to ask if I enjoy pizza, pasta and other Italian goodies. One cannot imagine an Italian experience without the food! More than once, I have been invited by Italians for a family meal, usually accompanied by detailed explanations of the particularities of the type of dishes offered, typical of the hosts' region of origin. Food here is not merely a necessary nourishment for the body; it is a social institution that enables people to meet, to talk, to laugh and to create relationships that build up a greater community.

I like the international environment of Milan; it gives the city an air of "foreignness" that very fast becomes "normality." The church has responded in various ways to this social mixture. One such foreign community I have met is that of Latin Americans who gather at a Sunday mass and various other activities in the beautiful Basilica of Santo Stefano. They celebrate in Spanish, but I have also found there speakers of other languages, for instance a young man from Bangladesh helping his compatriots who come to Italy as refugees or workers. There are many such groups, to name just a few: the French, the English, German speakers, those from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Korea, and many other countries.

These and other experiences were recapitulated for me last Saturday in a "*veglia ecumenica di Pentecoste*"—an itinerant prayer organized by various Christian churches of Milan. This year the *veglia* took place in the suburb of Monlué. Christians of all denominations present in Milan were invited to pray together and ask for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Already on my way to Monlué, I thought about the upcoming European meeting: with a map in my hand, I was approached by as many as three different people who offered help to find the parish! We prayed in churches, in the street, near highways and factories. Attentiveness towards foreigners, workers, the elderly and children was part of the prayer for peace. Songs of all sorts, from the "Latinos" from Santo Stefano to those of Coptic Christians in traditional white dress, made the prayer beautiful and opened our eyes to the riches of the local church.

Who was Ambrose of Milan?

The diocese of Milan celebrates the liturgy according to the Ambrosian rite, composed by Bishop Ambrose, who was famous for his gift of interpreting the Bible that led to the conversion of Saint Augustine. Some lines inspired by a text of the Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément help us to discover the creativity of that man who, after sixteen centuries, still marks the lives of the Christians of Milan:

Born in 334 in Trier to a family of wealthy nobles, Ambrose > 7

For practical information about the meeting in Milan, see the website page: http://www.taize.fr/en_article374.html

Here are two questions to begin your reflection:

- Do I wish, in the company of other young people, to seek for meaning in my life through prayer, reflection, and sharing?

- How can I be a peacemaker where I live?

The Eucharist Seen by a Christian of the Second Century

An expert in early Christian writings has pointed out that it was necessary to wait for the ninth century to find a treatise on the Eucharist. Before that time, although references to the Eucharist are frequent and of major importance, it was never the object of an independent work. For the first Christians, the Eucharist was never viewed in isolation. It was always linked to the entire mystery of the faith, and indeed represented a synthesis of it. If an essential aspect of the faith is called into question, then the Eucharist will serve as the reference-point to show whether we are on the right track or not. That is why, in the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons could say, "Our way of thinking accords with the Eucharist and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking." In following Irenaeus along this road, we are led to the heart of the faith.

The Goodness of Creation

Confronted with spiritual tendencies that disparaged the visible world, considering it as the result of degeneration, the great bishop of Lyons saw in the Eucharist a confirmation of the goodness of creation. How can we call that goodness into doubt since, as Irenaeus writes, "Jesus took the bread, which comes from creation, gave thanks and said: This is my body. And similarly the cup, which comes from the creation of which we are part, he declared his blood…" (AH, IV,17,5). The Eucharist does not confirm a way of thinking that shows contempt for creation. It expresses, on the contrary, the nobility of the material world.

The Resurrection of the Body

Irenaeus appealed to the Eucharist to sustain faith in the resurrection of the body. In the ancient world, Christians were mocked on account of that faith. Those who looked down on them felt that they themselves were the truly spiritual ones. With this debate, we are at the heart of faith in Christ and the Christian vision of God, but also of human beings and the life we are called to share with God.

To grasp what is really at issue in this debate, we must understand that the resurrection body is not a matter of molecules. Saint Paul, who affirms strongly the resurrection of the body, knows that everything will be transformed: "What you sow is not the body to come, but a simple seed" (1 Corinthians 15:37). There is thus a new body, a body of glory, and in this sense there is discontinuity; but we must also speak of continuity, for the plant or the wheat truly come from the seed.

Room for Difference in God

The body is the person in their personal history. Animated by faith in the Risen Christ, who at the Ascension entered for all time into God with his body of glory (human life was not a parenthesis for him), the first Christians were led to understand that the history of each person is welcomed in God: there is room for the most personal, for what is unique in every human being, for all that is compatible with love. This faith says that a life of eternity with God does not eliminate what is human. The most complete union imaginable with God is not at the cost of difference. If God calls each one by his or her name, that means that, in our life with him, we can do the same. We will meet those we have loved again. Nourished by the faith of the early Christians, Dostoyevsky could write at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*: "We will rise and we will see each other again; overjoyed, we will tell each other what happened." Refusing the resurrection of the body would mean disfiguring the God of the Gospel and his plan for human beings, for that God does not only tolerate differences but desires them, fosters them and gives them a future.

Irenaeus was convinced of all that: "How can they claim that flesh is unable to receive the gift of God consisting in eternal life, when it is nourished by the blood and the body of Christ?" (See AH IV,18,4). Through the Eucharist, the life of the risen Lord not only touches our mind; it does not only enter our ears like an idea. That food truly enters our bodies. Irenaeus emphasizes that Christians proclaim "in harmonious fashion the communion and union of flesh and Spirit. For just as the bread which comes from the earth, after having received the invocation of God, is no longer ordinary bread, but the Eucharist, composed of two things, one earthly and the other heavenly, in the same way our bodies, which take part in the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, because they have the hope of the resurrection" (AH IV,18,5).

Discerning the Vocation of the Created World

Taking part in the Eucharist thus becomes a way of proclaiming that the world has a meaning. Believers discern in it the vocation of all creation which is not destined to die, but to be transformed, for the Eucharist sings the victory of life. It is indeed necessary to pass through death; that is where the transformation takes place. But a seed has been sown in the Christian, which a forerunner of Irenaeus, Ignatius of Antioch, referring to the Eucharist, called "a medicine of immortality". Receiving the Eucharistic body of Christ, his risen life, means being welcomed into that space where death no longer exists and where the Spirit suggests "what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, what has never entered the human mind, all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Eucharist and Social Responsibility

Without being totally absent in Irenaeus' writings, another aspect of the Eucharist will be commented on at length by the Fathers of the third and fourth centuries. Celebrating the Eucharist means becoming aware of our social responsibility. If we become the Body of Christ by taking part in the Eucharist, if we are truly members of one another, then we can no longer behave as if we were not concerned by those in need. Thus among the first Christians there was born the tradition of bringing to the Eucharist an offering for the poor (this became the collection), since in Christianity all true mysticism leads to the performance of concrete acts.

Holy Spirit,
when our hearts
experience worry,
you open a way
forward for each of
us—entrusting our
entire life to God.

SEPTEMBER

DAILY READINGS

1 Thu Mk 10:42-45
Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world rulers lord it over their subjects and make their power felt. This is not to happen among you. No, anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

2 Fri 1 Co 1:10-13
May there be no divisions among you. Be closely united in mind and thought.

3 Sat Is 45:20-25
There is no other God but me, says the Lord. Turn to me and you will be saved, all you ends of the earth.

4 SUN Mt 18:15-20
Jesus said: When two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.

5 Mon 1 Th 3:6-13
Paul writes: Your faith has been a great encouragement to us in the middle of our own distress and hardship.

6 Tue Rm 5:1-11
Our hope will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

7 Wed Jr 2:1-13
The Lord says to his people: I remember the faithful love of your youth, when you followed me through the desert.

8 Thu Mt 1:16-21
An angel said to Joseph: Mary will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

9 Fri Jn 6:57-63
Jesus said: The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

10 Sat Jn 7:25-30
Jesus said: I am not here on my own, but the one who sent me is true. I know him because I am from him and he sent me.

11 SUN Mt 18:21-35
Jesus told a parable in which a king says to his servant: I cancelled all your debt because you begged me to. Shouldn't you then have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had on you?

12 Mon Pr 3:21-31
God will be your confidence, and will keep your feet from being snared.

13 Tue Lk 12:32-34
Jesus said: Give to those in need. Provide for yourselves a treasure that will not fail. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

14 Wed Lk 9:1-6
Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

15 Thu Mk 11:22-25
Jesus said: When you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, and your Father in heaven will forgive your sins.

16 Fri Heb 13:17-25
May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, equip you with everything good for doing his will.

17 Sat Ep 3:1-9
Paul writes: I have been entrusted with proclaiming the immeasurable treasures of Christ to the nations and to make plain the plan of the mystery that has been hidden for ages in God.

18 SUN Ph 1:20-26
Paul writes: Now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For me, to live is Christ.

19 Mon Ps 145
God is trustworthy in all his words, and loving in all he does. God supports those who stumble and lifts up those who are bowed down.

20 Tue Gn 50:15-21
Joseph forgave his brothers saying: Do not be afraid. The harm you planned to do me has, by God's design, been turned to good, to bring about the survival of a numerous people.

21 Wed Mt 9:9-13
St MATTHEW
As he walked, Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me". And he got up and followed him.

22 Thu Si 7:32-36
Give generously to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete. Let your generosity extend to all the living. Do not turn your back on those who weep.

23 Fri Ph 2:1-11
Paul writes: Be one in love, one in heart and one in mind; do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit.

24 Sat Ep 5:1-4,8-11
Paul writes: Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up for us.

25 SUN Mt 21:28-31
Jesus said: A father said to his two sons, "Go and work in the vineyard today." The first replied, "I will not," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The second replied, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?

26 Mon Lk 5:29-32
Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.

27 Tue 1 P 1:22-25
Peter writes: The Word of the Lord remains for ever. And this Word is the Good News that has been brought to you.

28 Wed Jn 15:1-8
Jesus said: I am the true vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

29 Thu Zc 8:7-8
The Lord God says: Look, I shall rescue my people, gathering them from east and west. They will be my people and I shall be their God, faithful and just.

30 Fri 2 Co 5:16-21
St. Paul writes: In the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

God, you love us, and we want to go to your wellspring in days of joy as well as in days of sorrow. And through your Holy Spirit you will speak to our hearts.

OCTOBER

1 Sat Lk 9:46-48
Jesus said: Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

2 SUN Mt 21:33-43
Jesus said: Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing and we marvel at it"?

3 Mon 1 Tm 2:1-8
God wants all people to be saved and to reach full knowledge of the truth.

4 Tue Si 17:1-14
God created human beings in his image; he has placed his light in their hearts.

5 Wed Rm 8:22-27
Paul writes: We look towards our salvation in hope. Now, to hope for what we see is not hope at all. To hope for what we do not see means to await it with constancy.

6 Thu Rm 13:8-10
All the commandments can be summed up in this: Love your neighbour as yourself.

7 Fri Jm 1:5-8
James writes: God gives to all in simplicity, without reproach.

8 Sat Ph 2:1-4
Paul writes: Do nothing out of selfish ambition, look not to your own interests but to those of others.

9 SUN Is 25:6-9
The Lord has destroyed the veil of mourning that enveloped all peoples. He has swallowed up death forever.

10 Mon Mk 9:30-37
Jesus said to his disciples: If anyone wants to be first, they must make themselves last of all and servant of all.

11 Tue Ps 119:25-32
I run in the path of your will, O God, for you have set my heart free.

12 Wed Is 60:18-20
God says to his people: No longer will violence be heard of in your land. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, your God will be your glory.

13 Thu Rm 13:8-10
St. Paul writes: Love does no harm to one's neighbour, and so love is the fulfilment of the Law.

14 Fri Si 28:2-7
Forgive your neighbour any wrongs done to you, and when you pray your sins will be forgiven.

15 Sat Ph 3:7-14
Paul writes: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

16 SUN 1 Th 1:1-5
Paul writes to the Thessalonians: We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

17 Mon Jn 14:1-12
Jesus said to his disciples: In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

18 Tue Lk 10:1-9
St LUKE
Jesus sent out his disciples saying: Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say, "The kingdom of God is very near you."

19 Wed Ac 5:17-33
God has raised Jesus from the dead to make him Saviour, and through him to change our hearts and grant forgiveness of sins.

20 Thu Is 49:13-15
Thus says the Lord: Does a woman forget her child at the breast, or fail to cherish her offspring? Even if she forgets, I will never forget you.

21 Fri Lk 24:35-48
The Risen Christ said to the apostles: This is what is written: The Christ will suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day. And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.

22 Sat Mk 9:38-48
Jesus said: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, they will certainly not lose their reward.

23 SUN Mt 22:34-40
Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is similar: Love your neighbour as yourself.

24 Mon Ep 3:14-21
May God strengthen you in your inner being through the Spirit, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

25 Tue Ps 130
My soul is waiting for the Lord, I rely on his promise; my soul relies on the Lord more than a night-watchman on the coming of dawn.

26 Wed Is 61:10-11
As the earth sends up its shoots and a garden lets its seeds sprout, so God will cause justice and praise to spring up.

27 Thu Rm 15:1-6
May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves, so that with one heart and one voice you may glorify God.

28 Fri Lk 17:3-4
Jesus said: If your brother wrongs you seven times in a day and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent", forgive him.

29 Sat Dt 30:11-14
God's Word is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

30 SUN Mt 23:1-12
Jesus said: The greatest among you will be your servant.

31 Mon Is 57:14-15
God says: My home is a high and holy place, but I am with the humble and contrite to revive their spirit.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer inTaizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

BIBLE MEDITATIONS

September: Psalm 16

Someone who possesses nothing discovers he has everything because he has God. Psalm 16 could be summed up quite well in those words. The believer who expresses himself here undoubtedly possesses nothing because he belongs to the tribe of Levi, which did not receive its portion of the Promised Land, because that tribe was devoted to the service of God.

The fact of possessing nothing could have led to bitterness or to extreme insecurity. The author of the psalm discovers just the opposite. But when he says: "I bless the Lord who counsels me; even at night my inner being instructs me," we can understand that the discovery was a progressive one. Everything may have begun with the awareness that something was lacking. It was in the night, gradually, that this person realized that he was filled. Now he is grasped by a clear conviction: his land is God. "My heritage is beautiful to me."

A certainty? Perhaps. But also the awareness of great fragility, because what this believer can sing about so admirably—a fullness found in God—can only be grasped in faith, a faith that is necessarily vulnerable. That is why, on the threshold of a psalm filled with strong affirmations, he asks God to keep him firm in this faith: "Protect me; I have no good without you."

In this psalm we have one of the rare texts in the First Testament that speaks of eternal life. It does not do so based on a creed that was handed down (in Israel no one yet dared make any clear statements on this subject), but by drawing the final consequences from the meaning of intimacy with God: if God is life and I am God's friend, then God cannot abandon his friend in death. There is no speculation about life after death. The psalm is wonderstruck at a friendship, which is welcomed in all its fullness and escorts the believer to the gates of this discovery: "my flesh will dwell in confidence… joy to the full in your presence."

- Have I sometimes understood better, in a situation of need, what possesses true value?
- What does it mean to say that God speaks to us in the night?
- How does this psalm help us better to understand the condition of believers?

October: Mark 3:31-35

In this passage, Christ uses a small incident as a starting-point to express something important about what it means to be close to him. His family, worried by the unexpected course his life is taking, come looking for him. When their arrival is announced, he responds with a startling question: Who are my mother and my brothers?

In the silence that follows, he looks around at the crowd about him, letting his words sink in.

Our family, our near relatives. What does this really mean? It suggests those who are close to us, and who carry the same family likeness. It implies those who have the right of access to us at any time, without any preliminary introductions or appointment-making. It also means those who have a claim on our help. And this is not by any kind of artificial arrangement, but simply by being who they are: the relationship is an organic one.

Who is it that really stands in this sort of relation to Christ?

By his answer, Christ does not intend to reject his own family, but to point out that there are people who are much more truly close to him than his natural relatives are: it is those who are there, listening to him; it is whoever "does God's will".

"Doing God's will" or "putting God's will into practice" does not mean following an arbitrary set of rules or submitting to orders that first have to be deciphered and then carried out. It implies a dynamic of trust. If we come to understand, however tentatively, that God loves us, little by little it becomes clear that God's will for us *is* his love, and nothing else. Trust in this leads to a desire to do what pleases him, a desire that can take root spontaneously and naturally. And what pleases him is nothing other than to love in our turn. It is by entering this dynamic of trust, even if we understand it only a very little, that we find ourselves counted by Christ as his brothers, sisters, and mothers.

- Why are "those who do God's will" more important to Christ even than his own family?
- What does "doing God's will" mean for me?
- What could it mean for me to be Christ's brother or sister or mother?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

studied law and rhetoric in Rome and then became governor of Liguria and Emilia, with his seat in Milan. When the bishop of that city died, while he was still preparing for baptism, Ambrose went to the cathedral to intervene in a theological dispute between those who refused to recognize Jesus as God and those who confessed his divinity. Because of his arbitration, everyone acclaimed him as bishop. He ran away, but was caught and received baptism and consecration as bishop at the same time! He distributed his fortune to the poor, of whom he would henceforth be the champion, deepened his theological learning, particularly that of the Greek Fathers, and preached tirelessly. With courage he affirmed the spiritual independence of the Church with regard to the State (*"The emperor is in the Church, not above it."*), contributed peacefully to the disappearance of Arianism (the current of thought that refused Christ's divinity), advised princes, and even obliged the emperor Theodosius in 390 to ask for forgiveness publicly because he had put down a riot in Thessalonica by a massacre.

Very aware of his responsibility to be a witness to Christ in the world and the surrounding culture, he deepened the philosophical thinking of his time, reading the philosophers Philo and Plotinus attentively, and bringing Christianity into dialogue with that living thought. He supported the first experiences of monastic community life, but always spoke of asceticism with delicacy and mildness. He encouraged the faithful to deepen their faith by reflection, forming priests who knew how to teach. A poet and composer, he is in fact the one responsible for the singing of hymns in the Latin Church, a type of singing that allowed all to join in the celebration.

(from Olivier Clément, *Sources: Les mystiques chrétiens des origins*)

India

Coming Together in Spite of Differences

I am Melvin, from South India in Tamil Nadhu state. In my parish in the city of Trichirappalli, I am part of a group of young people. I want to tell about my experience after the Tsunami wave hit the eastern coast of India last December.

On December 26, 2004, the wave destroyed 78 villages in Tamil Nadhu very badly. As soon as we heard about the tragedy, the members of our youth group, the I.C.Y.M., (Indian Catholic Youth Movement) gathered together and rushed to the affected villages. We began relief work even before the government could reach out. Seeing the situation, we decided that the most important thing was to make some food for the survivors. The next day we made 24,000 *Chapathi*, flour cakes, for 6,000 people. My friends and I went to a village and helped in clearing the dead bodies and giving them a decent burial. We helped in a village called Vailankanni, a shrine to the Virgin Mary where many Christians come on pilgrimage, but also Hindus and Muslims.

We distributed the *Chapathi*. Then the youth took part in collecting money, clothes and other relief material like cooking vessels, rice and sugar. Our youth movement took the responsibility for building a camp for 200 refugees. The I.C.Y.M. in the states of Kerala and Karnataka also came forward to help in this work.

From Germany Red Cross groups came to help, but they didn't know what to do. After they contacted our youth group, we spoke together and formed a plan to make 275 small houses and 85 fishing boats. They gave us the money, and we organized the job.

In these places of distress I saw all people come together without any difference of religion or caste. It was a wonderful and touching experience for me to work and give my service to broken humanity.

Echoes of the Forum

Every Saturday afternoon, young people from other continents who are in Taizé for two or three months to help with the work of welcoming are given the opportunity to share something. At the end of the week, when everyone is getting ready to go home, how can we invite each person to put into practice the little he or she has understood of the Gospel? The forum shows how faith leads some young adults to use their energy and creativity in the service of others in order to respond to the challenges present in their societies.

Message from Brother Roger on the death of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur:

To the family as well as to all those who loved Paul Ricoeur, I would like to say that my brothers and I share their sorrow in the confident expectation of our resurrection.

For fifty years, he came often to Taizé. We greatly appreciated his vast culture and his capacity to express Gospel values in present-day situations. He often helped us to reflect and more than once I was led to quote, in letters to the young, some powerful expressions he formulated on topics important for us, such as the meaning and the origin of evil. One day he said these words to us: "However radical evil may be, it is not as deep as goodness."

Today, with you, I would like to pray: "Christ of communion, you enable us to remain in communion with Paul Ricoeur, as with all those who have gone before us and who remain so close to our hearts. Already they are contemplating the invisible. In their steps you enable us to receive a ray of your brightness."

Taizé at World Youth Day

St. Agnes, Cologne (Neusser Platz, metro: Ebertplatz)
Cathedral, Bonn (Münster, Hauptbahnhof – Main Railway Station)

During the upcoming World Youth Day, Taizé brothers will lead prayers for four days in two churches at the same time: in COLOGNE at St. Agnes (not far from the cathedral) and in BONN at the cathedral (Münster, near the main railway station). These two churches are among the "spiritual centers" of World Youth Day. Outside of the times of prayer, there will be periods of silence and a welcome throughout the day.

Schedule of prayers:
Tuesday 16 August: 10am, 12noon, 2:30pm, 8pm, 10:30pm
Wednesday 17 August: 2:30pm, 6pm, 10:30pm
Thursday 18 August: 2:30pm, 8pm, 10:30pm
Friday 19 August: 2:30pm, 6pm, 10:30pm

Letter from Taizé

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